

Gary Catalano The Age 18 September 1985

review of exhibition at the Powell Street Gallery

"Meditations on the continuance of life

Michael Shannon is a curious painter.

On a first viewing, his recent landscapes at Powell Street seem disappointingly thin in their content.

You stroll from room to room and ask yourself what do we have here but hills and trees.

Yet as soon as you make this determination you begin to notice that there is another level to these pictures.

The stands of timber inevitably contain a number of dead trees whose leaning and pale grey trunks are commonly painted with a slurred or smudgy stroke, and in almost every painting a band of foreground trees runs from one side of the frame to the other.

Those which lack this last feature generally have a road winding over their rolling hills.

One of the more interesting things about these paintings is the nimble and unforced way in which they reconcile two sharply differing intentions, for they provide us with records of the landscape around Heathcote and Lilydale and simultaneously invest these records with symbolic resonance. The landscape is both itself and a projection of the human.

Put simply, Shannon's paintings are meditations on the continuance of life. They depict a coherent and unified world in which youth and age always exist together.

Shannon is able to achieve this resonance because he habitually works from small notational drawings produced in front of the motif. That delay between experience and expression gives him the necessary freedom and room in which to distil and transform his perceptions of the natural world.

This is a much more rewarding exhibition than it at first seems."